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FOR NEA/ARPI

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [KU](#) [FREEDOM](#) [AGENDA](#)
SUBJECT: FREEDOM AGENDA: KUWAITIS RALLY ON CONSTITUENCY

REFORM; INFORMATION MINISTER OFFERS RESIGNATION

REF: A. KUWAIT 1570
[1](#)B. KUWAIT 1529

[1](#)1. (U) Approximately 150 Kuwaitis staged a rally on May 5 in support of electoral constituency reform (ref b). Wearing orange and white, carrying signs that read "five for the sake of Kuwait," and exchanging "high five's," they protested for over two hours across the street from Seif Palace where the Council of Ministers was meeting on electoral district reform. The impromptu gathering, organized by SMS at a cost of 60,000 KD (\$205,480) according to one GOK source, brought together liberals, women's rights activists, college students, a few MPs, and a handful of Islamists. It was also a family affair: many protesters had infants and small children with them, all appropriately clad in orange.

[1](#)2. (U) Despite the small turnout, the protest is a positive, yet small step forward for democratic reform in Kuwait where rallies are rare. There was no opposition to the rally and the few police officers present seemed bored by the crowd and focused on traffic control and breaking up a scuffle between photographers. Organizers of the May 5 event clearly followed the example set by 2005 activists in support of women's political rights: selecting a theme color, using SMS and the internet (), and timing their demonstration with the Seif Palace arrival of the Cabinet. Nevertheless, protesters blame the small showing on tensions between liberal groups. They claim smaller student organizers approached experienced activists on how to organize the demonstrations. In return for assistance, the larger groups insisted on receiving full credit for the protest, prompting a greater rift among like-minded groups.

[1](#)3. (SBU) The protest had little impact on the Council of Ministers which appears to be giving more attention to reducing the 25 constituencies to ten and amending the constitution to increase the number of parliamentarians to [1](#)60. On May 8, Information Minister Dr. Anas Al-Reshaid, who serves on the ministerial committee studying electoral constituency reform, offered his resignation in protest of the proposed constitutional amendment. One of his staff members told PolChief, that while the Minister favors five constituencies, serious discussion of a constitutional amendment forced him "to take a stand." He shares many liberal concerns that opening the constitution for this issue will lead to additional and undesired amendments such as changing Article 2 to make Shari'a "the main source of legislation" instead of "a main source." She said Dr. Anas was also frustrated that constituency reform was being used as a pawn by both the Government and Islamist groups. Prime Minister Shaykh Nasser Mohammed has yet to accept Al-Reshaid's resignation and, according to Al-Reshaid's staff, is not expected to do so.

4. (SBU) Debate continues on the contentious issue and several liberal MPs continue to host diwanias (discussion salons) on the importance of immediate reform. There are also reports that Kuwait's first female minister, Dr. Masouma Al-Mubarak, Minister of Planning and Minister of State for Administrative Development Affairs, is expected to submit her resignation the evening of May 9 if the Government pursues plans to amend the constitution.

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